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OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF THE ARABS

SALADIN TO MODERN TIMES

Saladin

When the 'Abbasids of 'Iraq and the Fatimids of Egypt were too weak to control their provinces, Saljuq Turkish tribes overran Syria and Asia Minor and established many kingdoms. They made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem unsafe and threatened the Christian empire of Constantinople. In 1094 the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus appealed to Pope Urban II for help. The immediate result was the beginning of the Crusades. Islam was so divided and lacking in leadership, that the Crusaders made rapid progress and threatened Egypt as well as the Holy Land.

During the years 1127 - 1146 the Atabeg Turk, 'Imad al-Din Zangi, established a strong new dynasty between Mosul and Aleppo and checked the force of the Crusaders. His son, Nur al-Din, made further gains in Syria and also invaded Egypt, where his general was made vizir. When this vizir died he was succeeded by his young companion and nephew, Yusuf Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, better known as Saladin.

In 1171 Saladin ended the weak Fatimid rule in Egypt, making himself an autonomous sultan, nominally faithful to the caliph of Baghdad. Three years later, he became sultan of Syria, Palestine, parts of Arabia and North Africa, as well as of Egypt. After making himself the acknowledged leader of the Muslim armies, he spent the rest of his life defending his kingdom against the violent attacks of Barbarossa, Philip Augustus, Coeur de Lion and other heroes of the Crusades. He was one of the best and greatest rulers who ever lived.

From the time of Saladin's death in 1193 A.D. to the middle of the 13th Century, members of his family held feudal strongholds in different parts of his divided kingdom, while the Crusaders kept up their attacks from the west and the Tartars started their even more devastating attacks from the east. In 1254 St. Louis returned home, after attacking Egypt and fortifying the ports of Palestine and Syria. Four years later Hulagu captured Baghdad and his armies raided Palestine.

The Mamluk Rule

The widow of one of the descendants of Saladin married Aybak, who was master of her husband's bodyguard of slaves, or Mamluks, in Egypt. He and the two short lived leaders who followed him were beginning to fight for control over the members of Saladin's family who held feudal posts, when they were confronted by the invasion of Hulagu's Tartar hordes.



This crisis brought to the front a brilliant slave soldier, who was chiefly responsible for defeating the Tartars at 'Ain Jalut, 1260 A.D. He then murdered the military ruler of the state and made himself the Mamluk Sultan. He was called al-Malik al-Zahir Rukn al-Din Baybars, (1260 - 1277).

Baybars saved Palestine, Syria and Egypt from both the Tartars and the Crusaders. He finally crushed the Assassins and reorganized the land as a strong and prosperous kingdom. He brought a member of the family of 'Abbas to Cairo, where he re-established the 'Abbasid caliphate. The caliphs did not have temporal rule, but served as symbols of the continuing glory of Islam.

Twenty-four Bahri Mamluk Sultans, mostly Turks, ruled Egypt and its provinces from the middle of the 13th Century to 1382 A.D. Then from 1382 - 1517 twenty-three Burji, mostly Circassians, Mamluks ruled the land. Although some magnificent buildings were erected and certain cultural activities continued to exist, it was a period of intrigue, violence, bad administration, famine and epidemic.

The most tragic event of this unhappy period was the terrible invasion of Syria by Timur, who sacked one city after another, in 1401, and robbed the land of such culture and prosperity as remained.

The 15th Century was taken up with feudal quarrels at home and clashes with the growing power of the Turks to the north. The house of 'Uthman, or Ottoman Dynasty, had been growing in strength throughout the 14th Century and increased its power when Muhammad the Conqueror captured Constantinople in 1453 A.D.

At the same time the economic prosperity of the Arab lands suffered a serious set back, when Vasco da Gama opened up the sea route to India and caused a competition, which proved to be fatal to Red Sea and Persian Gulf trade routes.

Finally, in 1516, the Ottoman Salim defeated the Mamluk sultan at Marj Dabiq north of Aleppo and the following year seized Cairo. In 1543 the last of the puppet 'Abbasid caliphs died. A late fiction claims that he bequeathed his office to the Ottoman Sultan, Sulayman the Magnificent. The Ottoman caliphs were Sunnites and were never recognized by the Shi'ah of Persia and other parts of the Muslim world.

The Arabs during the Ottoman Period

The Ottoman caliphate lasted for over three and a half centuries. During this period the empire was not a highly centralized organization. Before modern means of transportation were introduced, it took a week to go distances now covered in a day. Arabia, most of 'Iraq, and the Syrian desert were occupied by tribes. Their chiefs carried

on constant raiding and occasionally joined together to wage more serious wars. The caliph used his troops to make sure that these tribes paid tribute and regulated their fighting so as to avoid injuring the empire itself.

As Turkish was the language of the state, Arabic culture became stagnant. The Arabic language was used for religious purposes, but in order to avoid unrest the caliphs discouraged religious and social change.

A few brilliant feudal lords attempted to become independent, but their efforts were short lived. One of these was the Amir Fakr al-Din, who was a chief of the Druze family of Ma'n in southern Lebanon. During the years 1590 - 1635 he gained control over a region stretching from Jerusalem to Aleppo, but he was over-powered by the Turks before he was able to establish an independent Arab state. Thus the progress of events from the middle of the 16th to the middle of the 18th Century belongs to Turkish, rather than to Arab history.

During the middle of the 18th Century Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahhab, who was a native of Najd in East Arabia, started a reform movement. He was angered by the superstition, worship of saint's tombs, excessive use of tobacco and general moral decay, which he found in the Muslim world. He persuaded the feudal chief of Najd, who belonged to the family of Su'ud (or Sa'ud), to champion a "back to the Prophet" movement.

At the same time that Napoleon Bonaparte was occupying Egypt and trying to invade Syria, the Wahhabi fanatics were destroying what they considered to be the idolatrous shrines in the holy Shi'ah cities of 'Iraq, purging Makkah and al-Madinah of superstition, and threatening to split off the Arab lands from Turkish control.

Napoleon occupied Egypt in 1798. His forces invaded Palestine, but were prevented by epidemic from pushing north to Syria. Napoleon's activities in Europe kept him from organizing the Arab lands. When he withdrew from Egypt the Albanian officer in charge of the Turkish troops gained control of the country. This was Muhammad 'Ali, who ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1849 A.D.

Muhammad 'Ali first of all made sure of his position in Egypt. Then he attacked the Wahhabi forces to the East and crushed them in 1818. A few years later he tried to help the Turks to win back rebellious Greece, but his efforts were frustrated by the British and Russians. His son Ibrahim Pasha was then sent north and by 1832 he had occupied all of Palestine and Syria.

In 1830 France occupied Algiers, which was the first part of the Arab world to come under European control.

At this time the Amir Bashir Shihab was the great fuedal lord of the southern Lebanon, who turned Christian for political reasons. While the British were backing the Turks, to safeguard their route to India, the French aided Muhammad 'Ali and his brilliant son. The Amir Bashir was caught in a difficult position between the two hostile parties.

Ibrahim Pasha ruled Syria until 1840. The presence of Lamartine and Lord Pitt's niece, Lady Hester Stanhope, in his province brought new ties with Europe. But Lord Palmerston feared the Pasha's independent spirit, so that his fate was sealed. In 1840 a British fleet attacked the Lebanese coast and drove Ibrahim Pasha out of the land.

During this period French, British and American missions began to make their influence felt in the Near East and to awaken the Arab peoples, by the progress of the Western world.

For twenty years after Ibrahim Pasha's withdrawal from Syria, the Lebanon was in a state of unrest. The British befriended the Druzes, while the French aided the various branches of the Catholic Church. Finally in 1860 the Druzes inflicted serious massacres on the Christians and even more fatal massacres took place at Damascus, where the Muslims attacked the Christian quarter.

Napoleon III and the British sent armies of occupation to Beirut and Mount Lebanon became an autonomous province, with a Christian Pasha, appointed by the Sultan but approved by the five European powers. This new organization demanded educated Arab officials and leaders for the Lebanon, so that several schools of higher education were established, which later developed into the Universite Saint-Joseph and the American University of Beirut.

In 1869 Ferdinand de Lesseps completed the Suez Canal. Although this tended to end whatever caravan trade had survived, it brought new political and commerical importance to the Arab lands. England's channels of communication with over four hundred million subjects in the East passed through Arab countries.

Although improved means of transportation were making it possible for the sultan-caliph to tighten his control over the Hijaz and al-Yaman in Arabia, his hold on Egypt weakened. In 1884 the British Consul at Cairo, Lord Cromer, took charge of the administration of Egypt, so as to save the country from financial collapse. The land of the Nile started on the way out of its long period of mediaevalism and to become a modern state.

Shaykh Muhammad 'Abdu, the Mufti of Egypt, began to interpret the Quran in accordance with modern ideas. Graduates of Beirut created a purely Arabic press in Egypt and Lebanon and published

monthlies to popularize science and history in the Arab tongue. Catholic and Protestant missionaries doubled their energies, so that many Arab men and women received western education. Emigration to America and trade with France and England made new points of contact with the West. After centuries of stagnation, the Arab world awoke and a far reaching renaissance movement began.

The Arabs had never experienced nationalism. Their loyalty had always been attached to their religion, or else to some tribe or popular chief. But contact with the intensely nationalistic European countries and study of nineteenth century history created an interest in nationalism. This interest took tangible political form, when it was encouraged by European agents in order to undermine the Turkish control.

A number of influential societies were formed in different parts of the Arab world during the years that immediately preceded the great war. In 1909 the Committee of Union and Progress gained control of the empire and began a regime of centralization and suppression of these Arab societies.

In the meantime Italy occupied Tripoli in Libya, 1911, and France established a Protectorate in Morocco in 1912.

The War and Post War Period

The World War began in 1914.

The British agent in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, gave the Grand Sharif Husayn, who was the feudal lord of the Hijaz, written assurances, which the Arabs interpreted as promising them the Hijaz, Palestine, Syria (except for the districts of Mersin and Alexandretta and the "portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo,") as well as certain portions of 'Iraq. Trusting in these documents, in 1916, the Grand Sharif Husayn of Makkah revolted against the sultan. Aided by Colonel Lawrence, the Sharif's army occupied 'Aqabah and pushed the revolt into Transjordan.

At the same time the British invaded both 'Iraq and Palestine. Their first attempts to overcome the Turkish forces were costly and unsuccessful. But they finally occupied Baghdad in 1917 and Lord Allenby marched into Jerusalem like a pilgrim during the same year.

At the end of the summer of 1918, when the German and Turkish armies were exhausted, Lord Allenby launched his cavalry along the seacoast while the Amir Faysal, son of Husayn, moved north through Transjordan and occupied Damascus, where he established himself as the ruler of a province attached to his father's kingdom in the Hijaz. The Turks withdrew to the Taurus Mountains, so that it was

an easy matter for the combined Arab, British and French forces to occupy all of Palestine, Syria, 'Iraq and Cilicia.

The Arabs then learned about the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 which placed Syria in the French zone of influence. They also heard of the document issued by the Foreign Office in 1917, familiarly known as the Balfour Declaration.

In 1920 the League of Nations, following the agreements of the San Remo Conference, established 'Iraq and Palestine as Class A mandates under England, and Syria (including Lebanon) as a Class A mandate under France. A few months later the Amir Faysal left Syria.

Reorganization after the War

(a) The Arabian Peninsula

As a natural result of the war the Persian Gulf states, Kuwait, Bahrayn, and 'Uman, passed from Turkish control and became autonomous principalities under British protection, similar to the native states of India. Bahrayn and Kuwait have become especially important because of valuable petroleum deposits. 'Aden, in the south-west corner of Arabia has been a British colony. Using 'Aden as a base, the Royal Air Force has been able to police the isolated valleys of the Hadramut so effectively, that raiding has been stopped and prosperity established under British protection.

'Abdul 'Aziz Ibn Su'ud was the fugitive heir of the family of Su'ud who in 1909 returned to his ancestral town of Riyadh in the Najd as an adventurer. He overcame the Turkish garrison and his hostile neighbors. During the war period he received substantial subsidies from the British to help them prevent gun running in Arabia. He organized the fanatical Wahhabis as a strong military force and then invaded the Hijaz and drove the family of the Grand Sharif Husayn from Makkah, al-Madinah and Jiddah. In 1926 he was proclaimed King of the Hijaz, as well as feudal chief of the Najd.

He later conquered Asir to the south and after a short war with the Imam Yahya, of the Yaman, signed treaties which settled the status quo in Arabia. By introducing automobiles, the radio, armored cars and other modern inventions, he has pacified the nomads, made the Muslim pilgrimage safe and started to exploit valuable gold mines and petroleum deposits. Under his administration the Peninsula has made more progress in a few years than it made in many centuries. In 1948 the Imam Yehya of Yaman died and was succeeded by his son, the Imam Ahmad.

(b) Egypt

Just after the war, violent disturbances took place in Egypt.

(b) Egypt (cont'd)

The national spirit grew so strong that the British established the country as an autonomous kingdom, with King Fuad I as the ruler, in the place of the former Khedive. Finally, in 1936, after many years of unrest and fruitless negotiations, the British and Egyptian governments reached an understanding, whereby Egypt became an independent state, closely bound to England by a diplomatic and military alliance. When Fuad died his son Faruk became King. During the Second World War, Cairo served as the headquarters of the Middle East Forces and Egypt was in the theatre of warfare. After the war the British agreed to remove their troops to the Canal Zone and Libya, although they failed to agree with Egypt about the administration of the Sudan.

(c) Transjordan

The strip of country that lies to the east of Palestine, and which includes the ancient regions of Gilead, Ammon, Moab and Edom, has been made a native state under British protection, with the Amir 'Abdullah, one of the sons of the Grand Sharif Husayn of Makkah, as the ruler. This is a thoroughly Arab state but has little contact with Arabia proper, as an old enmity exists between the Amir 'Abdullah and Ibn Su'ud. In 1946 'Abdullah was elevated to become a king and his state was granted independence.

(d) Palestine

After the war there were about 750,000 Arabic speaking Muslims and Christians and 55,000 Jews in Palestine. Due to the efficient administration of Colonial Office officials, the Arab population has increased to over a million, many schools have been organized, roads built, agriculture encouraged, lands surveyed, harbors built and the judiciary reformed.

The Arabs were so divided by family traditions and so impoverished by the war that they could not resist selling their lands to the Jews, who offered them exceedingly high prices. As fast as the Jews purchased land they brought immigrants from abroad, until the Jewish population grew to be about 650,000, or over a third of the entire population of Palestine.

The Arabs made some disorganized demonstrations against the Jews, but it was not until 1937 that they became so panic stricken that a Royal Commission was appointed to study their demands. When the Royal Commission recommended that the country be divided, the Arab protest took the form of a stubborn revolution.

In 1939 the White Paper was issued, which promised the Arabs a share in the government of Palestine and limitation of the Jewish immigration for a period of five years. It was not definite enough

to give satisfaction or to pacify the Arabs. At the same time the ill treatment of the Jews in Germany made immigration more urgent than before and won world wide sympathy for the suffering Jewish people. Thus the impasse continued to exist.

The outbreak of the Second World War caused both Jews and Arabs to accept the terms of the White Paper and to cooperate with the British. But when the war ended and the five year period of the White Paper also came to an end, the Zionists renewed their demands for an extensive immigration and an independent state.

In the autumn of 1945 the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry was sent to Palestine, but as the report of this body did not satisfy either the Jews or the Arabs, anarchy and terrorism increased.

In 1947 Great Britain announced that the mandate would be terminated and British troops withdrawn before the middle of the summer of the following year. The Assembly of the United Nations assumed responsibility for the future of Palestine and voted a plan for partition. As the Arabs refused to accept partition, and as the Jews refused to make further compromises, the termination of the mandate caused a bitter war between the states of the Arab League and the Jews, who proclaimed the State of Israel on May 15, 1948, with its capital at Tel Aviv.

(e) 'Iraq

Although the British occupied Baghdad in 1917, they did not conquer the tribes in the marshes of Southern 'Iraq. After a serious revolt had occurred, the British set King Faysal I on the throne and organized a new government in the form of a constitutional monarchy.

In spite of unrest, the tribes were pacified, many excellent institutions were organized, and the 'Iraq Petroleum Company was granted a concession to exploit the valuable petroleum deposits near Kirkuk and Mosul, on condition that it would pay large royalties to the state.

In 1930 the mandate was terminated and the country became an independent kingdom, bound to England by a military alliance. Two years later 'Iraq became a member of the League of Nations. When Faysal died, his son Ghazi became king. When he was killed in an accident, his infant son Faysal II, became his successor, with the Amir Abdul-Ilah as Regent.

In 1941 'Iraq entered the war with Germany, but the British Middle East Forces soon occupied the land and restored peace and prosperity. 'Iraq now has a population of 4,500,000, the vast majority of whom are Sunni and Shi'ah Muslims. There are also 125,000 Jews and a somewhat smaller number of Christians, most of whom are



Syrian and Chaldean Catholics and Nestorians. Many of the people are tribal. Among the Arabs there are Kurdish, Yazidi, Mandaean and Assyrian elements.

'Iraq has become a member of the United Nations. It has experienced remarkable progress and development since it gained its independence. The Government officials are now studying important projects for irrigation and land settlement, so as to enable the share-croppers and nomads to own their private farms.

(f) The French Mandate

In 1921, Lebanon, Syria and the Sanjak of Alexandretta were placed under French control, with Beirut as the seat of the Haut-Commissaire. In 1936, the French Haut-Commissaire initialed treaties, which established Lebanon and Syria as autonomous republics, bound to France by treaties. The French Parlement refused to ratify these treaties and in 1939 gave back the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey. Soon afterwards the Second World War began and General Weygand organized a large army in the country.

In May, 1941, the Vichy regime in France cooperated with the Germans and Italians to such an extent, that the British under Field Marshall Wilson and the Free French under General De Gaulle, finally occupied both Syria and Lebanon. The railroad line was completed from Haifa to Tripoli and many new highways were constructed by the armies.

In November, 1942, the Free French announced the independence of the Syrian and Lebanese Republics, expecting that in return they would bind themselves to France by treaties. During the summer of 1943, elections were held. Bechara el-Khoury became President of the Lebanese Republic and Shukri Bey Kuwatli of Syria. As the newly elected governments were very nationalistic, they refused to make treaties with France and insisted upon taking over the control of the government departments from the French.

On November 11, 1943, General De Gaulle's officers arrested the President and most of the members of the cabinet of the Lebanese Republic. A Lebanese army assembled at 'Ayn Anub, but after ten days the British forced the French to return the prisoners and to confirm the independence already promised.

In the early summer of 1945, the Syrians became restless, because instead of carrying out promises to evacuate their troops, the French were bringing in reinforcements. The French bombarded Damascus for several days and a state of war existed throughout Syria. Finally the British army again intervened and the French withdrew their troops, leaving Syria entirely independent.



During the summer of 1945, Syria and Lebanon opened up legations at Washington, London, Paris, and other places and sent representatives to the San Francisco meeting of the United Nations.

The Arab League

On March 22, 1945, the Arab League was formed at a meeting held in Cairo. Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and al-Yaman were the charter members.

The war with the Jews over the Partition of Palestine served to bring the states of the Arab League closer together during the spring of 1948.

At the same time active Communist propaganda in the Arab States developed a new feeling of partnership between the Arabs and their Turkish and Iranian neighbors. If the Arab League does not become the victim of foreign influence and military aggression, it promises to help bring a new period of progress and cooperation to the Middle East in general and in particular to the Arabs.

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